

AN
INTRODUCTORY LECTURE,

ON THE

CAUSES OBSTRUCTING

THE

PROGRESS OF MEDICAL SCIENCE.

BY JOSEPH N. McDOWELL, M. D.

LECTURER ON ANATOMY.

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Cincinnati, Nov. 15, 1830.

Doct. Jos. N. McDOWELL,

At a meeting of your class this evening, we, as a committee in behalf of said class, were requested to solicit you to favor us with a copy of your Introductory Lecture, for publication.

We are, respectfully, &c.

CHAUNCEY GOODRICH, }
JOSEPH L. HORNSBY, } Committee.
NEWTON LANE.

Cincinnati, Nov. 16, 1830.

Gentlemen,—Allow me to tender to you, and to my class, through their committee, my thanks for the regard they have exhibited for my very humble production, in soliciting a copy of it for publication.

It was not written with the expectation of its being thus honored, but relying on your judgment, and the sincerity of your request, it is at your disposal.

Messrs. C. GOODRICH,
J. L. HORNSBY, N. LANE.

With esteem,
Jos. N. McDOWELL.

INTRODUCTORY LECTURE, &C.

To the philanthropist and to the lover of medical science, nothing is more pleasing than the contemplation of whatever is calculated to extend, elevate and render more useful that branch of liberal learning; and whatever will enable the members of the profession to overcome the causes which have hitherto been the most powerful barriers to its present elevation, cannot be without its interest.

In tracing the history of medical science from its infancy to its present elevation, briefly pointing out the causes that have obstructed its progress, and endeavoring to straighten the crooked path to professional elevation, my effort, however feebly executed, will command, I doubt not, your approbation.

History informs us that medical science had its origin in India and China, where it is said to have been systematically practised, long before it was known among the Egyptians, to whom our medicine is usually referred.

But we cannot wholly rely on history for its origin, since from the very nature and constitution of man, he has ever been the inheritor of pain, sickness and death, and although at times exempt from the diseases consequent on civilization, he has ever been subject to injuries from outward accidents, if not from internal causes; and doubtless from the time of his creation the instinctive principle implanted in his bosom for the promotion of his happiness and the preservation of his life, has led him to search for remedies to give him relief in sickness, and to prolong his existence: coeval then with the ills of humanity, must be dated the commencement of this invaluable science. Many nations however, may have existed among whom there were no physicians; but we cannot conceive of a time when remedies for accident and disease were not employed.

In tracing the causes obstructing the progress of medical science, and recounting the many obstacles adverse to its elevation and improvement, it will not only be necessary to take a view of the characters who have figured conspicuously in it; but also to examine the condition of every age and

nation in which it has been cultivated,—just as the geographer who would describe the course of a stream whose sources were numerous, and whose direction to the ocean was circuitous, would necessarily associate in his description the hills and the valleys of the country through which it meandered, exhibiting at the same time, its eddies, its rapids, its whirlpools, and its cataracts. To do this in detail, (which is not our intention on the present occasion,) would require a minute history of the science, which though it could not but be interesting, would exhaust your patience, and occupy too much of our time.

Commencing with Egyptian Medicine, the most remote fountain of our now majestic stream of science, we must regret the uncertainty of its history, which only affords a fruitful field for the learned conjecture of the medical antiquary, who is willing to substitute for reality, the fanciful visions of his imagination. Originating among an enthusiastic and zealous people, it was enveloped in its infancy by the grossest ignorance, and the mother from which it drew its sustenance was the wildest superstition. Their limited knowledge rendered medicine rather a monopoly than a liberal science. Freedom of enquiry was neither sought nor desired, and those individuals who were its cultivators, being ranked among their deities and oracles, obtained implicit confidence, while those who were known to deviate from a prescribed course in the profession, were answerable to the law for their offence, and suffered the punishment consequent on their transgression. Thus to Hermes has been attributed a course of practice from which no physician was permitted to depart without incurring, if he failed of success, the guilt and punishment of a murderer. The inevitable consequences of such laws, could not but prove disastrous to the improvement of medicine, and reflect but little credit on a people, among whom it is said the cradle of sciences was first rocked by the hand of liberality. In passing from the dark obscurity of Egyptian annals to the plain and certain records of Grecian science, the contrast strikes the mind, as does the brilliancy of the noon day sun the eye, when first its rays burst from behind a clouded sky.

From the extraordinary and singular energy of character so peculiar to this nation, it could not be supposed that the land which has ever been the theme of the orator and the

poet—the delight of the patriot and the scholar—the land where life and animation seem to be the result of the sculptor and the painter's skill, and which has done so much for the advancement of every art and every science—would have neglected that of medicine, which by all is acknowledged to be to man the most valuable. While other departments were justly proud of a Homer, a Demosthenes, a Solon and a Plato,—medicine boasted of her Esculapius, her Hippocrates, and her Aristotle,—together with many others whose genius and research did more for the advancement of medical science than all the world beside, down to the period in which they lived. Yet although we acknowledge Greece as the country which made the greatest improvement in early medicine, and stamped upon it many of the features that have characterized it in all succeeding ages, we cannot but lament that the most able cultivators of the science, devoted so little of their time to the investigation of the anatomy of the human body,—the rock on which all rational medicine is founded, and without a knowledge of which, all theories are but idle speculations, calculated rather to amuse the fancy of the student of medicine, than increase his fund of useful and practical knowledge. Hippocrates, the reputed father and founder of medicine, to whose industry we are indebted for an accurate account of all the diseases which come under his inspection, the greater part of which are still known by the same names invented and adopted by him,—was, no doubt, grossly ignorant of the structure and functions of most of the organs of the human system. The heart, the great organ of circulation, was considered both by him and by Aristotle, the general sensorium, and its vessels the media for the communication of its influence to every part of the body; and the brain the great receptacle of redundant moisture, and a condenser of vapours, which it discharged by defluations and catarrhs; never suspecting in the least that it was at all connected with sensation. Notwithstanding the absurdity of these opinions, which seemed rather to be conjecture than the result of examination, yet being supported by names of high standing and authority, they were, doubtless, the prevalent doctrines for several successive ages.

It was not indeed, until the reign of the Ptolemies, who succeeded to the African division of the Alexandrian conquests, under whose guardianship the first anatomical in-

vestigations of the human body were made, that Erasistratus and Herophilus by their examinations, gave to the world the first ideas of a system of sensibility, depending on the brain and nerves, the true use of which seemed never to have been suspected by any of their predecessors. Among the ancient Greeks the investigation of the structure of the human body did not, however, depend alone on the aversion of the cultivators of the science to the dissection of dead bodies, but upon the religious prejudice of the people, who viewed the individual engaged in such pursuits, not only as a violator of the sanctity of their religion and the grave,—but as a wretch devoid of moral sensibility, deserving the scorn of man and the utmost severity of the law.—Being thus debarred from the use of human bodies, those of animals were resorted to by the most zealous in medical improvement, which gave birth to comparative anatomy; but having few opportunities to compare the structure of the inferior order of animals with that of man, all their conclusions were little else than the pictures of fancy, because drawn from uncertain data. These, however, were not the only causes opposing its progress. Following the example of Egypt, the profession for a long period of years was monopolized by certain families, and its benefits transmitted from generation to generation, without exertion, or without merit: Thus Hippocrates was reputed to have been the eighteenth lineal descendant from Esculapius.

In leaving Grecian medicine to trace the course of the science in ancient Rome, in the early part of the history of that nation, the contrast is equally great, as in the transition from Egypt to the former country. In the ancient republics of Greece dignity and elevation were the results of superior acquirements in those arts which alleviate the common sufferings, and soothe the ordinary asperities of human life; but among the Romans, on whose native and unsubdued ruggedness was founded their extraordinary power & pre-eminence over other nations, these arts were less esteemed and encouraged. Thus we can readily account for its late establishment and the slowness of its improvement in that country. From the early ages of that nation down to Galen's return from the school of Alexandria, there was not an instance of the examination of the human body for anatomical purposes. And although this sage in the profession, early exhibited in Rome

his superior qualifications from his knowledge of anatomy and the importance of such attainments, every danger and difficulty must have been the attendants of such examination among a people whose superstition caused them to inter their dead at night, lest by the sight of the body, their priests should become polluted, and their religion profaned. But it cannot be supposed that they were wholly inattentive to the subject, or negligent of the common and obvious methods of relieving pain, or promoting the healing process of broken limbs or injured parts. The vanity which so long held in the utmost contempt the manners and customs of foreign nations, and the courage which made them brave every danger, and their firm and ardent patriotism, must have occasionally yielded to the more powerful and instinctive principle, which bids us hope in disease and affliction for health and happiness. But excepting the priests, who officiated in the temple of Esculapius, situated on a small island in the Tiber, there is no mention in their history of practitioners of medicine, or even of apothecaries, before the sixth century from the building of the city: and such was the prejudice of the people against the admission of foreign medicine among them, that Cato himself, the intrepid defender of the rights and liberties of his country, with the utmost indignation opposed the adoption of Grecian medicine, or medicine at all, as a cultivated science, while with childish inconsistency he used its most ridiculous and ineffectual remedies.

It is remarkable that among the many edicts relative to public affairs, none was ever issued in reference to the health of a city whose population was so numerous, and whose climate has ever been a fruitful source of human maladies. It is no less astonishing that among the Grecian trophies won by the valor of their arms, that whilst they set a great value on the statues, and paintings, and books of various kinds, that the writings of the immortal father of Grecian medicine, should have remained so much unnoticed and unknown. By degrees however the prejudices of the people diminished, and the various arts and sciences, including medicine, began to improve; but from that period to the days of Celsus and Galen, the profession was little else than a farrago of ignorance and witchcraft, the practice of which was chiefly confided to barbers, to slaves, and the most inferior and degraded portion of society. Here and

there were found an extravagant Thessalus, and an Asclepiades, but their exertions tended rather to the disgrace than the elevation of medicine. From the reign of the emperor Augustus to the third century of the Christian Era, there was little improvement other than that made by the learned and classic Celsus, whose writings did much both for materia medica and surgery, and by the most distinguished of Roman physicians, Galen, who being thrown in the world at a time when the two conflicting religions were wasting the strength of the mighty empire, assumed the reign of medicine and rendered his name and writings almost oracular wherever it was known or cultivated, for more than thirteen hundred years. But notwithstanding much is to be ascribed to Galen in the improvement of the science, yet so long and uninterrupted a sway in medicine must be in part, if not wholly attributed to the general causes which at this particular crisis almost extinguished the lights of learning, shrouded the earth in darkness, restored the ancient dominions of chaos and of night, and sank all Europe, for a long period of time, in the most degrading barbarism. The termination of the life of Galen was the commencement of this long and disastrous period, and to whatever causes may be attributed the decline and fall of Roman greatness, it is to the convulsions of a tottering empire that the decline of liberal science is mainly to be referred.

Of the immediate successors of Galen few arrived at much distinction or contributed any thing of worth to the science. Oribassius, the physician and friend of Julian, although greatly admired for his fidelity to his Emperor, deserves but little credit for his voluminous writings, which were but the apings of his predecessors. But at no distant period, after the destruction of the Pagan religion and Pagan privileges, the unreasonable pre-eminence of the priesthood, with less honorable and disinterested motives than their advocates have generally assigned them, usurped the profession, and identifying it with their ecclesiastical privileges, hastened its rapid strides to darkness and degradation. The absurdity of ecclesiastical interference with the medical profession cannot be too severely censured; for in attempting to perform both the duties of a minister and a physician, they could not have been actuated by a zeal for the improvement of the science, but by a desire to accomplish the

basest and most avaricious designs; prohibited, as they were by their clerical garb, from anatomical researches, the most legitimate source of its useful improvement. In pursuing the course of the science in its low and mean condition in Europe, during that intellectual darkness which covered all christendom for more than a thousand years,—although we venerate the name and religion of our redeemer, we cannot but think it just that the degradation of medicine should be attributed to the undue usurpation of the clergy. Forbidding the study of useful books in the sciences, they substituted pretended visions and miracles, for nature and common sense; and according to Walker, an intelligent English historian, masses, penances, and pilgrimages, were the chief articles of the *materia medica*, while a donation to a church or a monastery, were the most infallible cures for the maladies of the human body. But not content with sinking medicine to the lowest degree of ignorance and infamy, and prostituting their own profession by casting a foul stain on the sanctity of their religion, inquisitions were established to examine into the conduct of enquiring physicians, which under the vile pretence of prosecuting fraudulent and magical practices, confined them in the gloom of an inquisitorial dungeon, or led them with the cross in one hand and the torch in the other, to the faggot and the stake.

After a long interval of time, during which the black cloud of ignorance and superstition seemed rather to increase than diminish, efforts were made by Charlemagne and Frederick the Great, to renovate and establish institutions of learning and the arts; but such was the lethargy of the times and the influence of the priests, that the light which it was fondly hoped would be the evidence of its resuscitation, resembled but the flash of lightning in the midnight storm, which, when the glare has passed, leaves the scene in augmented darkness. The mind of Europe fettered in this turbulent age by feudal bondage, and plunged into the deepest abyss of moral ignorance, was not destined to recover itself, or emerge from its lethargy, without an entire revolution in the character and condition of the people, the accomplishment of which could not hastily be effected by any cause however cogent in its operation. Of the causes most productive of the change which was gradually preparing benighted Europe for the dawn of science and liberty, the wild en-

thusiasm of the crusades seems to have been the most effective. Fired with the zeal of making a conquest of the holy land, every grade of society was roused from its lethargy, and a reformation was commenced in science and in literature; the masterly strides of which have increased with an equal ratio with the advance of improvement, and ere long will proclaim the emancipation of still degraded Europe, and the wide diffusion of human knowledge and human good. Pledged for the redemption of that which they considered of all things most sacred, armies were seen marching, whose myriad numbers reached from Palestine to the gates of Constantinople. Compelled, as they were, to traverse countries far superior to their own in refinement and information, they returned fascinated with the charms of Grecian and Arabian Literature, bringing with them manuscripts of various kinds, most of which were deposited at Salernum, a city in Italy, whose inhabitants were desirous of making it the emporium of science, and which was peculiarly distinguished as the city of the Coan sage of Greece; though this venerable author was known only in the base concealment of a much corrupted Arabian garb.

In turning aside to take a view of Arabian medicine, the polluted fountain from which Europe received its medical information at this period; we much lament that although medicine was in high repute in the Mahometan Empire, and the pecuniary reward of medical practitioners was exceedingly great, as was evinced by the princely fortunes and honors bestowed on some of the most eminent, there was little improvement of the art among this people; and notwithstanding they at an early period received the writings of Hippocrates, Aristotle and Galen, —all of which were valuable materials on which to base and rear a splendid superstructure in medicine. But we are told by Abi Asbaia that from a remote period among his countrymen the profession descended in a hereditary line; a custom of all others most highly calculated to prevent improvement; and this was, doubtless, one of the causes of the imperfection of their medicine. The ignorance of the translators of the Grecian and Roman writers was, probably, its greatest barrier. Authors of much distinction were but few in number and possessed but little knowledge other than that which they copied from writers of other countries, among whom may be enumerated Rhazes and Avicenna. In the voluminous writings and translations of the former we have the first description of the Small Pox;

the origin of which has baffled the skill of every succeeding writer on the subject. Avicenna commencing his medical career as a teacher of medicine at the age of sixteen, reared among his countrymen a fame which was for the Arabian nation a pattern they were proud to imitate, but whose renown they had no ambition to surpass. But although little can be said in praise of Arabia in reference to medical improvement; yet it is proper that credit should be given her for the addition to the *materia medica*, of several of its most valuable articles.

As letters revived, the sole depository of the learning and the arts was among the ecclesiastics. These men, whose education far surpassed that of the ignorant multitude, were the only individuals in this benighted age on whom the scattered rays of science shone. Though they did nothing for the advancement of science, and though they actually perverted the pure streams of medical knowledge by the phantasies of superstition, candor and justice demand that the honorable and meritorious services they conferred on the various branches of literature and science should be fairly stated. Immured in the monkish cell, they with the most indefatigable zeal, spent their lives in comparing the relics of the classics with the Arabian translations. They copied out in a careful manner, the most accurate transcripts of Greek and Roman learning, noting interpolations and supplying deficiencies. And while the philologist awards them the merited honor of preserving pure the majestic notes of Homer and the dulcet strains of Virgil, far be it from us to forget that through their instrumentality the writings of the Coan sage and of the Roman Celsus have descended to us in unadulterated purity. It is much to be regretted that after this mention of their merits our commendation must cease; for we shall presently show in what manner the interference of the priesthood and of the monastic order, contributed to retard the growing progress of medical science, and to deter its advocates from its successful cultivation.

Having thus traced medical science from its earliest origin down to the period when it began to break the fetters of feudal bondage and to shake from its neck the yoke of Popish usurpation, we turn our eyes to view those ages in which ignorance and fanaticism marked our profession as the peculiar object of their unholy persecution, and the field in which the immortal martyrs of medicine sacrificed their lives at the stake and the gibbet, with no less honor to human nature than to the

glory of the profession. Such was the extraordinary power of the Roman Pontiff, the infatuated zeal of the priesthood, and the blood thirsty disposition of the most vigilant inquisitions, that from the eleventh even to the sixteenth century, the track of science was only marked in blood; and few and solitary indeed were the instances of genius and independance struggling in obscurity and fear. Among those heroic worthies who justly deserve immortality, stands conspicuous Petrus Aponeous, a native of Italy, who prompted by a desire to benefit mankind and to elevate his profession, published his medical sentiments without permission from the almost omnipotent Pope, which placed him in the merciless hands of the inquisition who sentenced him to the torture of the stake, but fortunately dying in prison before the sentence could be executed, his effigy was burnt in the market place at Padua, to satisfy the rage of his heartless persecutors.

Another meritorious scholar and anatomist, Andrew Vesalius, who at the age of twenty received an appointment in a school of medicine, and with untiring zeal in the prosecution of his studies reared for himself a monument of fame, based on the gratitude of every enlightened mind, and whose name will be cherished by the wise and good to the latest period of the world. The dangers he encountered, the difficulties he overcame, the perplexities he suffered in opposing and counteracting the prejudices of the people, equalled in medicine, the mighty operations of a Cæsar, or a Bonaparte in war. Yet notwithstanding his energy of character, and all his vigilance and caution, he became the unhappy victim of the never sleeping animosity of the inquisition. Being condemned to die at the stake, it was only through his high claims at court that his sentence was commuted by king Philip to a pilgrimage to the Holy Land; in returning from which he perished with famine after a shipwreck on a small island in the Archipelago.

Michael Servetus, an indefatigable student of nature, who demonstrated the wonderful circulation of the blood through the heart and lungs, proving, as did also his contemporary Columbus, that from the construction of the valves of the heart it could not assume a retrograde motion, but must constantly be propelled forward, and had not his infatuation with religious reformation made him the peculiar object of persecution and a martyr to his opinions,—he would, in all probability, have discovered the entire circulation of blood through the body.

The quick and powerful impulse given at this period to every branch of liberal learning, by the flood of light which was poured upon the world, by the most valuable of all arts, the art of printing; and the zeal and energy which had been infused by the cultivators of science into their successors, formed a new era in the improvement of medicine. Interrogating nature, the bountiful parent of all science, instead of adhering scrupulously to the ancient authors, who had been as oracles among them, new fountains were opened, from which the waters of life flowed freely, in more copious and less adulterated streams. And notwithstanding the wild enthusiasm which led the chemical philosophers to search in the laboratory of nature for the philosopher's stone, and the elixir of life, was obviously inconsistent with common sense, yet in pursuit of the phantoms of their imaginations, they were led to the discovery of unknown qualities and modifications in her elements which enhanced the stores of knowledge, and added to the comfort of man.

Many improvements were made in this science in the progress of time by the cultivators of its various departments in different countries. While a Sydenham, a Cullen and a Boerhaave were enlarging the bounds of chemistry, materia medica and the practice of physic, a Fallopius, a Harvey, a Haller, and a host of others were making discoveries in surgery and the structure and functions of the human body. But the credulity of man and his wonderful propensity to fall into the opinions of the wise and learned who have preceded him, or who are his contemporaries,—which at every period of the world has been a great obstacle to improvement and the extension of science, seems to have been a peculiar inheritance of our profession. Age after age the opinions of one man have stood, though uninvestigated, as the beacon or land mark for thousands who have attempted to explore or cultivate the same field in which he had been their predecessor; and who, had they attempted it, were, perhaps, more competent to lay down principles and investigate nature with more accuracy and effect, than those in whose aphorisms they implicitly confided. To the shame and disgrace of medicine, nothing is more true than that exalted authorities have been the support of some of the most blind, baseless, and fanciful theories, which possibly could have been conceived by the human intellect.

From the days of Hippocrates to those of Hanneman of Germany, and Broussais of France, theory after theory has been propagated, and each for a time has been alike the glory and contempt of the world. And in the period of their duration, rarely indeed have they had an opponent. Pressed on by the popular current, men believed because others were of the same opinion, without thought or investigation. And those who dared to oppose the prevalent doctrines, were not only few and widely separate, but if unable to demolish the fair fabric, and erect on its ruins one more plausible and more fascinating to the profession, shared with their productions degradation and oblivion. But the melancholy fact of their rapid succession and decline has recently excited the profession to the study of nature and common sense, rather than to depend upon doctrines and hypotheses, drawn too often from a partial and insufficient experience. Often has the ambitious aspirant pursued with eagerness the phantoms of his imagination, hoping without grounds to establish a name and a reputation,—and at no time consulting the interests of humanity, or the dignity or elevation of his profession. Substituting the shadow for the substance, with plausible eloquence and ingenious subtlety, he has captivated the mind of the student, and instead of enlightening his understanding and leading him to truth, has darkened the obscurity of the subject and augmented his difficulties. But since the commencement of the study of the science by interrogating the silent dead, more has been done for the advancement of the healing art and the relief of the human family, than had been achieved by all the theories which ever delighted or misled the world. Since then we are to look to anatomical investigations for the extension and advancement of our science, to remove every obstacle opposing such examinations, should be the assiduous study of every individual who would offer relief to the anguish of the sick, or who desires the expansion of human knowledge.

When we look back on the past ages and view the black cloud of ignorance and superstition which obscured the vision of the human intellect, and enthralled the minds of men, we are not astonished that the grave, in which the treasure of medicine was buried, should have been guarded with unceasing vigilance; or that students of anatomy were viewed

as sacrilegious monsters, rather than the benefactors of the human race. But we are not only astonished but chagrined when we are compelled to acknowledge that in this enlightened day, and in this happy country, said to be the home of freedom and the nurse of the arts, that while we exalt to the highest station among us, individuals who have sacrificed thousands of their fellow beings at the shrine of ambition, the anatomist, who is the acknowledged benefactor of man, is the scorn and scoff of society; and that too in a country where we are taught by the bible the corruptibility of the body, the immortality of the soul, and the omnipotence of the Creator. Do not think that in our zeal for the cultivation of anatomy, the sanctity of the private burying grounds will be disturbed or the feelings of surviving friends or relatives disregarded. For it is the desire of every man in the profession, and of every teacher of anatomy, who is not devoid of moral sensibility, that the offender against these sacred rights of the people, should meet the punishment due so unhallowed a transgression.

Without a knowledge of the structure of the human fabric, the practice of physic would be but a torture and disgrace to man. But such knowledge can be amply obtained from the body of the vagrant and the malefactor, who are not only destitute of relations and friends while living, but having neither served their God, their country, nor themselves, should be made, after death, subservient to the profession.

Although we have attributed much to the superstition and ignorance of mankind in opposing the progress of medicine, yet more is attributable to the jealousy and invidious strife that have too long been the opprobrium of our profession in every age and country. This morbid conception of the real interests of medicine and of each other, has not only brought down, undeservedly, the contumely of mankind on the science, but has ever been a prejudice to individual merit and distinction; and though the opinion so generally entertained that talent and worth rarely go unrewarded, be plausible, yet such has been the degree of this most despicable of all human passions, that unless the individual be possessed of abilities so obvious as at once to silence his opposers, he is neither allowed to benefit himself nor mankind by becoming conspicuous in his profession. Even the im-

mortal Harvey did not escape the ravages of this gnawing worm which has ever fed on the most promising buds of medical genius. Notwithstanding the irresistible proofs and the numerous experiments he exhibited on animals, showing incontestibly the truth of his positions, that the blood circulated through the body by means of the heart and its appendages, yet such was the prejudice excited against him by the jealousy of his brethren, that he lost among his contemporaries his reputation and his practice.—Even now, while I speak, the young aspirant, who honestly seeks the glory and honor of his calling, is wantonly made the subject of raillery and abuse, too low and ignoble to have been conceived by a generous mind, and too debasing to have come from any but a corrupt and polluted fountain.

While we would promote every laudable exertion in medical improvement, and encourage freedom of thought and freedom of enquiry, we would not be considered the advocate, but the ardent opposer of the wild enthusiasm of the ignorant and daring empyrics who pretend to cure all diseases with a particular nostrum,—and teach, in less time than the title pages of half the books in medicine could be read, a profession, every branch of which, requires a life of devoted study. Devoid of principle, such characters have, for the most part, set out rather for the accumulation of fortunes than the preservation of lives, expecting only to receive their reward in proportion to the prejudice they excite in the minds of the people against a science, whose ample fields their indolence would not allow them to explore or cultivate. — Of those characters who have been distinguished for their folly, ignorance and stupidity, or for their fraudulence and deception, Rome has had her Thessalus, England her Solomon,—and it has pleased the Almighty to visit America with her Thompson.

Having thus imperfectly sketched a few of the many causes obstructing the flow of the healing stream of science, the more important task of directing the minds of my brethren to that which will break down the existing obstructions, that its future flow may be more rapid, deep and broad, remains to be performed. And though our remarks on this subject must necessarily be few, it would be an ample field for an hour's lecture.

Few individuals engage in a profession, who, if they

do not direct their ambition to the most lofty station to be obtained, seek some situation which will not only confer ample emolument, but digrity and honor. Yet too often is the zealous aspirant after he has gone through a long life of labor and difficulty, the subject, in old age, of gloom and despondency, brought upon him by a retrospect of mispent time, and ill directed ambition. The most towering genius, though his efforts be made with Herculean strength, is often left to regret, when it is too late to make amends, that the object which he so ardently sought has been obtained by minds of an inferior rank and less able to make a vigorous exertion, because their search was directed in a different channel. He then, who cultivates his profession with the hope of distinction, must zealously guard against the causes that have so often blighted the prospects of his predecessors, and have his eye ever fixed on the beacon which would guard him against the rock that has wrecked the hopes of thousands not less sanguine of success, and whose prospects of distinction were equally flattering.

To attain distinction in the science of medicine, a liberal and well grounded education is to the student of the utmost importance. Without it at every step he meets a labyrinth he cannot unravel, and difficulties which his abilities, however great, cannot surmount. Unfortunately for the improvement of medicine, this, either from poverty or other causes, has too often been the case, & deep and devastating have been its operations. But whatever be the attainments of the student in the commencement of his studies, a devoted and assiduous attention should be given to the elementary branches of the profession. The anatomy and physiology of the human system, together with chemistry, materia medica and botany, are the materials most valuable to the medical architect, because the great foundation of the profession; and in proportion as attention is given to the breadth and solidity of the basis, will be the height, permanency and beauty of the building..

Gentlemen,—these studies cannot be too strenuously urged upon you. They are essential to your success in the improvement and elevation of yourselves and your profession, and as indispensable as is nutriment to the human frame, or vitality to the performance of its wonderful operations. But with mortification we are compelled to acknowledge that

thousands in our country are shamefully ignorant of these fundamental branches, and yet have the presumption to rank themselves among the honored members of the profession.

The man whose only ambition is to amass wealth by practising a fraud on mankind, should meet his deserved punishment at the hands of the people, and never be rewarded with the titles or honors of medicine. To secure success in science we should ever cherish an enthusiastic ambition; and while we would spurn in the dust the envious maledictions of the indolent and ignorant of our brethren, we should direct our minds to the loftiest point, that can be obtained by the utmost exertion of human intellect,—The difficulties to be overcome are great, but they can be and have been surmounted. The prejudices so long and vehemently entertained against the dissection of human bodies, although not dispelled by the diffusion of light and learning, are by degrees yielding their grasp; and indolence and a want of energy are now the great obstacles to the attainment of all that could be sought or desired on the subject.

To-night, gentlemen, we have assembled to commence not only a course of study, which I earnestly hope will eventuate in an accurate knowledge of what is already known on our subject, but to aid in the elevation of medicine, and add to the comforts of man. In the commencement of this arduous work let us resolve to prosecute our studies with untiring zeal; and as of old did Jacob wrestle with his Maker for a blessing, let us never cease to interrogate nature and the dead, until we shall have obtained health and happiness for ourselves and our fellow beings.

Do not expect to be fascinated with the language which is to convey to you this knowledge. If these be your anticipations, they will not be realized; but while a jargon of terms salute your ears, if you will but look with an eye of attention on the structure of the human system as displayed before you, your heart will be filled, not with the eloquence of man, but with the admiration of the mightiest effort of the Maker of the universe.

While on this pilgrimage let the works of our predecessors, who labored under more disadvantages than ourselves,

be a stimulus to exertion, and though our efforts may not be prolonged to even a middle age, we may yet win by our diligence, unfading laurels. Let us ever keep in view the character of a Vessalius, a Bichat and a Godman, each of whom, ere they had lived half the allotted time of man, reared a fame as bright and as unfading as the constellations of Heaven. Who would not aspire to the fame of a Hippocrates, a Celsus and a Galen? those venerable names of antiquity, whose honors have withstood the corroding effects of time, and will be transmitted to the latest generations of the world, floating on the wreck of nations and of empires.

Making the elevation of these distinguished characters the high and laudable object of our attainments, and ardently pressing forward with unity and zeal, in the prosecution of our studies, we will rear in honor of medicine and ourselves, a mental pyramid whose base will be as broad as the earth, and whose top as lofty as the skies.

